

# THE U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES & RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

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## Teaching With Documents: Observing Constitution Day

### The Constitution Game

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The following activity was developed by Rennie G. Quible, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Volunteer Docent, as an introduction to a unit on the Constitution. It is frequently used by [NARA volunteers](#) with visiting school groups and by volunteers who visit local schools.

#### **Standards Correlation:**

#### **This lesson correlates to the National Standards for United States History:**

- Era 3 - Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)
  - Standard 3A: Demonstrate understanding of the issues related to the creation and ratification of the United States Constitution and the new Government it established.

#### **This lesson also correlates to the National Standards for Civics and Government:**

- Standard II. A. 1: Explain central ideas of American constitutional government and their history.
- Standard V. D. 4: Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the importance to American constitutional democracy of dispositions that facilitate thoughtful and effective participation in public affairs.

#### **Time required:**

One class period

#### **Objective:**

To describe how the members of the Constitutional Convention might have felt as they gathered and began the arduous and memorable task of writing the United States Constitution.

**Materials needed:**

Envelopes containing:

- 1 die
- 12 paper clips
- The following rhymed instructions:

It's time to play a little game.  
No two groups will play the same.  
What and how is up to you.  
The group must choose what it will do.  
Use the things that you find here.  
It won't take long; you need not fear.  
In six short minutes you'll share your fame  
By telling how you played your game.

**Procedure:**

1. Arrange students into groups of three or four.
2. Distribute one prepared envelope to each group, instructing participants to wait for a signal to open them.
3. Instruct the students to follow the instructions contained in the envelope. Caution them to remember how they feel as they follow the instructions.
4. Give the signal to begin. The word "Archives" works well as a signal.
5. Circulate around the room, and remind students to remember how they are feeling as they play the game. When students ask what they are to do, simply say, "Follow the instructions you found in the envelope."
6. After 6 minutes, instruct participants to stop the game.

7. Ask a spokesperson from each group to describe the game they devised, and how they felt as they played. Some of their remarks might include the following: we were confused, we thought it was dumb, we did not know what to do, or we were excited about getting to make it up as we went along.
8. List the responses on the chalkboard.
9. After all groups have reported, begin describing the Constitutional Convention:

In May of 1787, outstanding citizens from 12 states gathered in Philadelphia. They planned to be there only a little while. They had come to improve the Articles of Confederation and try to create more unity and cooperation among the states. Rhode Island sent no representatives.

How did those men feel that May? (Read the responses the students offered in reference to their feelings toward the game.)

Today, you used 12 paper clips. They represent the patriots who came from the 12 states. The die represents luck and each day that rolled around from May 25 to September 17. You figured out how to play the game. They figured out how to write our Constitution. And while they went about the great task of writing the United States Constitution, they probably felt much the same as you did today.

Additional information about the [Constitution](#), a [lesson plan](#) related to the ratification of the Constitution, and [biographies of each signer](#) are also available online.

A [teaching packet](#) containing a detailed Teacher's Guide and a set of 34 document reproductions that highlight the making of the Constitution, the beginning of the Government, and the evolution of a constitutional issue is available for purchase from the National Archives.

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[Observing Constitution Day Main Page](#)

Page URL:

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